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## THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NEW MUSIC IN THE ACADEMIC COURSES OF THE MOSCOW STATE CONSERVATORY

Soviet cultural politics was completely determined in the 1930s and remained unchangeable almost until the collapse of the USSR (1991).

Like other areas of spiritual activity, musical creativity was subject to the dictates of the strict ideological standards of socialist realism, which left no room for free artistic experimentation. Under these conditions, the full-fledged existence of new music as a social phenomenon was impossible. The artistic heritage of the 1920s Soviet avant-garde was displaced to the periphery of the musical life; it was eventually almost forgotten. To denote a kind of art alien to the Soviet people the term ‘formalism’ was used; officially designated the predominance of form over content, but in fact served as a tool of ideological pressure. In such a situation nobody could affirm the existence of new music institutions, including those related to the learning process. This situation continued in more liberal times, which began after Stalin’s death. “Dodecaphony is cacophony!” declared Nikita Khrushchev at a meeting of artists in 1962. It is not surprising then, that in Russia, even after the debunking of the cult of Stalin (1956) and the rise of the so-called “Khrushchev Thaw”, almost right up to Gorbachev’s *Perestroika*, probably every composition written in a “new” language was accompanied by ideological cross-examination and serious restrictions on its performance. This political stagnation turned into a hardened artistic-aesthetic routine, and the process of natural evolution in art acquired the traits of an almost heroic stoicism in a number of artists.

Nevertheless, the development of the Russian post-war avant-garde began in the second half of the 1950s, with the first dodecaphonic work dating from 1956 (*Musica Stricta* for piano by Andrei Volkonsky), and a whole group of works employing serial techniques already appearing in 1963-64 (*I Symphony* by Arvo Pärt, *Italian Songs* by Edison Denisov, *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* by Alfred Schnittke etc.). In developing mastery of the new musical techniques, Russian music followed the Western avant-garde, although it frequently found its own individuality. Perhaps the widest international resonance amongst Russian works of the time was achieved by Denisov’s cantata *Sun of the Incas* (1964), which has been played by the world’s best-known musicians, but attracted violent criticism in the Soviet Union of Composers, sparking a heated debate in the journal *Soviet Music*. Another way of fighting the avant-garde was to keep silent about it in the official press.

However, the truly new works gradually penetrated into concert halls; new music became known and even popular among concertgoers, who perceived it as a symbol of spiritual freedom.

All this had no relation yet to educational institutions and to teaching, which remained hopelessly conservative. The real institutional changes came only after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s. On the one hand, they were dramatic, as the state had provided virtually no financial support for culture up to then; on the other hand, they paved the way for various private initiatives.

Back then, there were three main directions associated with new music: first of all, the establishment of new composers' associations; secondly, festivals of contemporary music; thirdly, the performing collectives connected to them.

In 1990, a group of middle generation composers announced the formation of the Association of Modern Music (ACM-2) and the eponymous ensemble, in opposition to the traditional line of the Union of Soviet Composers. In its initial form, ACM-2 did not last long – the collapse of the USSR and the mass emigration of its members automatically transformed it into a section of the Moscow Union of Composers; however, its activities left a clear imprint on the last years of Soviet music history. It was in just these years that the festival *Moscow Autumn*, established by the Moscow Union of Composers, had its conceptual regeneration.

In 1993 the Centre for Contemporary Music was instituted; its purpose was the building of new infrastructure, to embrace all aspects of the functioning of modern music, from study to festival-concerts. In the same year, the ensemble Studio for New Music was founded, and in 1994, the annual international festival of contemporary music *Moscow Forum* had its première. All of these initiatives were launched with the aim of integrating Russian music into the broader European musical context.

These three institutions, namely the Centre for Contemporary Music, the ensemble Studio for New Music and the festival Moscow Forum, were established in the Moscow State "Tchaikovsky" Conservatory, and therefore played a crucial role in the formation of new teaching principles for contemporary music. I shall briefly introduce the three organizations.

The Russian Centre for Contemporary Music in Moscow (CCMM) is an associate member of the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music). It was formed as an independent department in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. It unites all kinds of musicians whose interests are concentrated in the field of contemporary music, and plays a leading role in the development of serious contemporary music by supporting and encouraging composition, performance and research. The Centre activities include

- 1) Monthly concerts by its core ensemble – Studio for New Music
- 2) Annual international festival of contemporary music – Moscow Forum
- 3) Discussions, Workshops and Lectures, and Musicological conferences

4) Young composers' competitions and performance of pieces by young composers

5) Promotion of new Russian music at home and abroad

Studio for New Music (SNM) is an ensemble-in-residence at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. It is the leading contemporary music group in Russia. The ensemble was founded in 1993, taking at its model the best similar Western collectives, by composer Vladimir Tarnopolski and conductor Igor Dronov. Their first concert took place in France with Mstislav Rostropovich as conductor. Every year the ensemble performs about 50 programs in Moscow and throughout the country, and is a frequent guest in many Western contemporary music festivals. SNM has performed at such major venues as Berlin Philharmonie, Paradiso Amsterdam, Konzerthaus Berlin, Jacqueline du Pre Concert Hall Oxford, Deutschlandfunk Koeln, Cité de la Musique Paris, Schoenberg Center Vienna, and Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden among others. They have conducted a variety of workshops at the universities of Oxford, Harvard and Boston, to name a few. SNM has been the first and so far the only Russian group to be invited as ensemble-in-residence at the Darmstadt International Courses for New Music in 2010. The group has given many concerts in most European countries and has toured the USA several times.



Fig. 1 – Studio for New Music at the Venice Biennale 2011, Teatro Malibran.

SNM has premiered about 900 compositions of Russian and foreign composers. It cooperates with other leading foreign ensembles, such as Ensemble Modern, performing Russian premieres of pieces by Andriessen, Boulez, Ferneyhough, Grisey, Hurel, Lachenmann, Ligeti, Murail, Rihm, Nono, Stockhausen, and many others.

SNM has presented about 60 concert-portraits of leading contemporary composers. Many of them – such as Ivan Fedele, Nicolaus A. Huber, Enno Poppe, Roger Redgate and many others – have written their new works especially for the group. Special attention is also paid to all forms of collaboration with young composers in competitions, workshops, and several other forms. In recent years, Studio for New Music has actively worked on projects with live electronics, video and multimedia, commissioning new works from Russian and European composers, as well as bringing over to Russia some of the most interesting already existing works such as Fausto Romitelli's *An Index of Metals*, to be premiered in Russia in December 2013. In the wide repertoire of the group, special emphasis is placed on the Russian 1920s avant-garde (Gavriil Popov, Nicolai Roslavets, Alexander Mosolov and others). One of the most important events of this kind was the world première of the Chamber Symphony No. 2 by Nikolai Roslavets (composed in 1934), which was recently found in an archive.

SNM has risen to become the ensemble-in-residence at the Moscow Conservatory. It is the core ensemble of the *Moscow Forum* Festival of contemporary music. In 2002, 2005 and 2012 Studio for New Music won the prestigious grants of “Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung” for several two-year series of anthological concerts in Moscow and in the Russian regions. In 2010 Studio for New Music won a grant of the European Commission for producing the large-scale project *Europe through the eyes of Russians. Russia through the eyes of Europeans* with 18 new commissioned compositions by Russian and European composers.

Since 1994, the Moscow Forum Festival has taken place every year upon the initiative of the Moscow Conservatory's Center for Contemporary Music. Its artistic director, composer and composition professor Vladimir Tarnopolski, conceived the Moscow Forum Festival as a panorama of the Russian and international musical avant-garde, as well as a discussion panel for the musical cultures of different countries.

The primary duty of the Moscow Forum Festival is to propagate the Russian music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to encourage the creativity of young composers. The festival also tries to compensate for the lack of information, and the resulting cultural gap, regarding the classics of the international avant-garde.



Fig. 2 – Moscow Forum 2007.

The Moscow Forum Festival has earned high esteem in Russia and abroad, as shown by its list of participants. In various years, the Festival could boast performances by ensembles and soloists who are undisputed world leaders in the performance of contemporary music, including Ensemble Modern (Germany), Klangforum Wien (Austria), Scharoun ensemble (Germany), De Volharding (The Netherlands), Alternance (France), XX. Century (Austria), Toscanini Orchestra (Italy), the Arditti Quartet (UK), the Danel Quartet (Belgium), and many more.

So, what can students learn under the new conditions?

The teaching programs are coordinated by the Department of Contemporary Music, which determines their theoretical and practical content. There are postgraduate studies graduates of the Orchestra Faculty who wish to play the new repertoire. This special class is called Contemporary Music Orchestra, and forms the basis for Studio for New Music. During the postgraduate course, young musicians get involved in the concert activities of the Studio, rehearsing together and participating in concerts. They learn to master new techniques of instrumental playing, which are usually not taught at academic faculties. In order to enter the Contemporary Music Orchestra, young musician must pass an admission exam, which includes new virtuoso pieces by contemporary composers such as Luciano Berio, Elliot Carter, Franco Donatoni, Pierre Boulez, Hans Werner Henze, Yannis Xenakis, Peter Maxwell-Davis, Giacinto Scelsi, Antal Dorati, Ivan Fedele, Edison Denisov,

Pascal Dusapin, Krzysztof Penderecki, Philipp Manoury, George Crumb, György Kurtág, Helmut Lachenmann, Tristan Murail, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Alemdar Karamanov and so on. The teaching at the Choral Conducting Faculty is also practical: the Conservatory Chamber Choir mostly performs a contemporary repertoire.

There are also special courses, in which students can learn contemporary works. They willingly attend them, as the new repertoire is now a part of many competitions. The pianists or string players have also the opportunity to learn new techniques, which are necessary for performing this repertoire. The complete course is one semester, and includes a wide range of topics.

Let me to introduce some of them as an example.

*For pianists:*

1) New types of piano music notation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. New kinds of sound and their notation: soundless touch, resonances, echoes, the third pedal, playing on the strings, harmonics, noises. Measure and its absence, proportional notation. Octave shifts. Repetition and repetitive patterns. Aleatoric compositions. Graphic notation and its decoding.

2) New techniques for piano sound (some examples: Henry Cowell, *Aeolian Harp*, *The Tides of Manaunnaun*; John Cage, *The Perilous Night*, *Bacchanale*; George Crumb, *Makrokosmos I*, *Makrokosmos II*, *A Little Suite for Christmas, A. D. 1979*; Helmut Lachenmann, *Wiegenlied*, *Guero*).

3) Contemporary competitions and festivals: finding one's way through competition requirements, new music competitions; program requirements for: Olivier Messiaen Competition (Paris), Maria Yudina Competition (St. Petersburg), 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music Competition (Orléans), Gaudeamus Competition (Amsterdam).

*For string players:*

1) Timbre as the basis of composition. Micro-chromatics, sound complexes and separate tones as units of the form. Playing with extreme pressure of the bow. Noises, playing on the body of an instrument, on a finger-board etc. New concept of musical sound.

2) New techniques of string sound (some examples: Violin and alto: Giacinto Scelsi, *Manto I* for alto solo, *Anahit* for violin and 18 instruments, String Quartets n. 3 and n. 4; György Ligeti, String Quartet n. 2, Concerto for violin and orchestra; Iannis Xenakis, *Embelie* for alto solo, *Dikhtas* for violin and piano, *Ikboor* for violin, alto and violoncello, *Tetras* for string quartet; Helmut Lachenmann, Toccata for violin solo, String quartets n. 1 *Gran Torso*, n. 2 "Reigen seliger Geister", n. 3 *Grido*. Violoncello: Krzysztof Penderecki, *Capriccio for Ziegfried Palm*; Alfred Schnittke, *Improvisation*, Sonata for cello and piano, Quartets 1-4; Sofia Gubaidulina, *In Croce* for cello and organ (or bayan); Helmut Lachenmann, *Pression*, *Nocturne* for cello and small orchestra; Luigi

Nono, String Quartet *Fragmente – Stille, an Diotima*; Alexander Knaifel, *Lamento* for cello solo).

### 3) Contemporary competitions and festivals

Finding one's way through competition requirements, new music competitions. Program requirements of the following competitions: ARD (Munich), Schubert Competition (Graz), Premio Borciani, Gaudeamus (Amsterdam), Rostropovich Competition (Paris), Lutoslawski Competition (Warsaw), Fondazione Curci (Naples) etc.

Finally, I would like to mention the Composition Faculty of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, which has received significant benefits thanks to both the Studio for New Music and the Centre for Contemporary Music. The students of the Composition Faculty have a good chance to hear their own academic works for chamber ensemble. Moreover, there is a special course for future composers under the title "Composition techniques in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Century Music". It combines in-depth study of the new music with practical mastering of instrumental techniques of contemporary compositions.